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ABSTRACT

A 20-item questionnaire was mailed to 123 laboratory schools to investigate their involvement with educational research. The findings on the 57 schools that responded were organized into two categories: (1) background information on all respondents; and (2) information on research activities based on responses of the 39 schools identified as involved with the conduct of research. The schools served a range of students between nursery school and twelfth grade and had a mean enrollment of 329 students. Funding sources were colleges or universities, public schools, and tuition. Information on the schools' research activities was given in the areas of funding, researchers, types of projects, computer availability, research dissemination, and incentives. Other matters investigated included the option of parents to exclude their children from participating in research projects and the strength of research in the schools' operations. Conclusions drawn from the survey are that the number of laboratory schools is diminishing, the schools are seeking to expand their roles, and that research is becoming increasingly important. Incentives to conduct research included promotion, tenure, and continued employment. Obstacles to research activities were limited time and lack of money and research skills. The tabulated responses to the questionnaire are appended. (FG)

THE DEVELOPMENT OF RESEARCH AS A ROLE IN LABORATORY SCHOOLS

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Introduction

More than 100 laboratory schools currently operate in the United States. The earliest American predecessor of these schools was established in Lexington, Massachusetts, in 1839, (Eubanks, 1931). Teacher training was the primary function in the nation's first laboratory school. The role of research in American laboratory schools can be traced to the 1860's and the normal school concept (Harper, 1939). Laboratory schools were established as a part of many of the early normal schools. Although, research was not the primary function in these schools, it was in these settings that laboratory school research first received attention.

In 1883, Colonel Frances W. Parker became principal of the Cook County Normal Schools in Chicago (Hughes, 1959). An integral aspect of this kindergarten and elementary school was experimentation and investigation of teaching. The inclusion of research as a significant laboratory school function was firmly entrenched.

The expansion of laboratory schools' roles to include research is evidenced in the establishment of two other laboratory schools in the late 1800's. In 1887, the Horace Mann School was opened at Teacher's College, New York City. This school became one in which professors of education might "experiment with the curriculum and methods of teaching as professors of science experiment in the laboratory," (Perrodin, 1955).

John Dewey developed a laboratory school at the University of Chicago, while serving as head of the Department of Education and Philosophy, 1884-1904. In this school, the primary purpose was "to further the

appreciation of scientific concepts and methods of the conduct of school work," (Hughes, 1959).

Although research was recognized as a viable function of laboratory schools, dating back to Chicago's Cook County Normal Schools, it has not been the primary focus of attention, with a few significant exceptions. Howd and Browne (1970) identified changes in laboratory school roles. In this report, a decreased emphasis is accorded student teaching. Additionally, the areas of research and experimentation, along with in-service education, are identified as receiving increased interest.

Based on a 1980 survey of laboratory schools (Page, 1981), research is an important, though not the most predominant role. In prioritized order, respondents in the survey depicted four major roles: instruction of students, teacher education, research, and in-service education.

Methods and Procedures

The current study was structured to elicit specific responses relative to research activities in laboratory schools. A twenty item instrument was mailed to the 123 laboratory schools listed in the 1981-82 National Association of Laboratory Schools Directory. Fifty-seven instruments were completed and returned to the investigators.

Findings

Findings of the study were computed on a frequency ratio. These findings are organized into two categories. Initially, background information for all respondents is described. Second, research information is provided based on the responses of the 39 schools identified as involved with the conduct of research.

The organizational structure of responding schools ranges from nursery or kindergarten to the twelfth grade. Nursery or kindergarten levels are housed in 89.5 per cent of the schools. Twelfth grade is the final level in 24.6 per cent of the schools. The number of years of service as a laboratory school ranges from 6 to 127 years, with 51.474 years being the mean. The number of students enrolled per school ranges from 20 to 1527. The mean enrollment is 329.175. The systems of student admission vary. The two most frequently used factors are: (a) applications with quotas based on variables, in use by 31.6 per cent of the schools; and (b) applications on a "first come" basis, in use by 28.1 per cent of the schools. A range of sources exists for funding laboratory school operations. The three most frequently utilized are: (a) college/university, 40.4 per cent utilization; (b) public school funds, 31.5 per cent utilization; and (c) tuition, 24.5 per cent utilization. The number of full-time faculty members employed ranges from zero to 140, with 22 faculty members being the mean. The number of part-time faculty members employed ranges from 0 to 41, with a mean of 5 part-time faculty members. The number of full-time administrators employed ranges from 0 to 7, with 1.404 administrators being the mean. The number of part-time administrators employed ranges from 0 to 4, with a mean of .561 part-time administrators. The most significant issue relative to background information is whether or not schools are involved in research. Of the 57 responding schools, 68.4 per cent report involvement with research. More detailed data on background information is provided in Table I.

Ten questions on the survey instrument relate to research information. College/university funds provide the primary financial source of support for research projects. Additional significant sources are federal and state funds. College/university faculty members are the primary researchers, while laboratory school faculty members and graduate students are also significantly involved in conducting research. Descriptive and experimental research projects are the most prevalent types produced. The primary source of available computer services for analysis of research data is located on the college/university campus, external of the laboratory school. Paper presentations, workshops, and monographs are most often utilized as channels for dissemination of research findings. Promotion, tenure, or continued employment are the most significant incentives for faculty participation in research projects. Personal satisfaction and monetary remuneration are other meaningful incentives. Work load and financial support are the primary obstacles that restrict research activities. In 66.7 per cent of the schools parents have the option of requesting that their child be excluded from participating in research projects. Research has been a function of laboratory schools an average of 33 years. In considering research projects of the last five years, 59 per cent of the respondents report that the current level represents an increase. More specific data on research information is provided in Table II.

Conclusions

The following conclusions have been identified utilizing information from a review of literature and this research study.

1. Due to increased costs in higher education, the number of laboratory schools is diminishing.

2. Many of the remaining laboratory schools are attempting to expand their roles to offer broader contributions to education and to maximize support of their existence.

3. Although research is not the primary function of most laboratory schools, this role is becoming increasingly important.

4. While promotion, tenure, and continued employment appear to be the greatest incentives for conducting research, personal satisfaction and interest in research also provide incentives.

5. Limited time for research activities is a significant obstacle in laboratory schools that conduct research. Additionally, money, environment, lack of research skills, assistance, and interest are obstacles that restrict research activities.

Summary

Research has been a function of the laboratory school concept for more than 100 years. Historically and presently, the degree of involvement in research by individual schools varies extensively. However, many laboratory schools are expanding their roles to include more research. This expansion should be a carefully developed systematic procedure.

> The expanding role of the laboratory school necessitates a research facility and staff to accomplish the plans formulated, and an educational facility and teaching staff to develop an experimental program which makes research possible . . . Only the laboratory school which exists to fulfill this expanded role can render the services necessary to accomplish a function that is of such educational significance to the nation, (Hunter, 1970).

Table 1

ASSESSMENT OF RESEARCH IN LABORATORY SCHOOLS

Background Information

I. What is the range of grade levels offered in the organizational structure of your school?

Lowest Grade . . . . . 89.5% of the schools began with a "pre-school" (nursery or kindergarten) program.

Highest Grade . . . . . 24.6% ended their program with the twelfth grade
24.6% ended their program with the sixth grade
17.5% ended their program with the eighth grade
17.5% ended their program with kindergarten
15.8% ended their program with other grade levels

Total number of levels included in the school:

Mean 8.228
Median 7.625
Mode 7.000

II. For approximately how many years has your school functioned as a laboratory school?

Range . . . . . 6 years to 127 years
Mean 51.474
Median 49.813
Mode 50.000

III. Approximately how many students are enrolled in your school?

Range . . . . . 20 to 1527 students
Mean 329.175
Median 235.000
Mode 200.000

IV. Describe the system used for admission of students to your school.

	Percent of Schools
Application; quotas based on variables	31.6
Application; "first come" basis	28.1
Attendance zone in school system	14.0
Application, competitive (through testing)	8.8
Priority for children of univ. faculty	7.0
Application, admittance based on lottery	7.0
Admittance based on special needs	3.5

V. From what major source are funds derived for the operation of your school?

	Percent of Schools
College/University	40.4
Public school funds	31.5
Tuition	24.5
Federal f[redacted] (Head Start)	1.8
No answer	1.8

Table 1 continued

VI. How many full-time faculty members are employed for service in your school?

Range	0 to 140 faculty
Mean	21.614
Median	14.000
Mode	14.000

VII. How many part-time faculty members are employed for service in your school?

Range	0 to 41 faculty
Mean	5.000
Median	3.375
Mode	0

VIII. How many full-time administrators are employed for service in your school?

Range	0 to 7 administrators
Mean	1.404
Median	1.138
Mode	1.000

IX. How many individuals are employed for part-time administrative service in your school?

Range	0 to 4 administrators
Mean	.561
Median	.338
Mode	0

X. Is research one of the functions of your school?

Yes	68.4%
No	31.6%

Table 2

Research information

(Compiled from the 39 schools reporting research as a function of their schools.)

I. What funding sources are utilized for research projects? (1-high priority,6-low)

	Mean
College/University	2.179
Federal	3.641
State	3.795
Personal	4.513
Foundation	4.538
Other	5.436

II. Who conducts research in the laboratory school? (1-high priority,5-low)

	Mean
College/University	2.077
Laboratory school faculty	2.333
Graduate students	2.718
Undergraduate students	3.718
Other	4.744

III. What kinds of research projects are conducted? (1-high priority,4-low)

	Mean
Descriptive	1.769
Experimental	1.769
Historical	3.513
Other	3.949

IV. What is the location of computer services that are utilized in the analysis of data of research projects? (1-high priority,5-low)

	Mean
College/University	1.615
Laboratory school	4.205
Commercial	4.615
Private	4.769
Other	5.000

V. What channels are utilized for the dissemination of findings? (1-high priority, 5-low priority)

	Mean
Paper presentation	2.205
Workshop	2.897
Monograph	3.154
Other (including journals)	4.128
Book	4.282

VI. What incentives are available to encourage faculty participation in research projects?

Incentive	Percentage of schools listing this factor*
Promotion, tenure or continued employment	38.5
Personal satisfaction or interest	35.9
Money available	25.6
Release time	10.3
Assistance with projects	5.1

VII. What obstacles exist that restrict research activities?

Obstacle	Percentage of schools listing this factor*
Time (work load)	64.1
Money	43.6
Environment not conducive	25.6
Lack of research skills, assistance, or interest	12.8

VIII. Following the admission of a child to your school, do parents have the option of requesting that the child be excluded from inclusion in research projects?

Yes	66.7%
No	33.3%

IX. For approximately how many years has research been a function of your school?

Mean	33.103
Median	18.333
Mode	10.000

X. In considering research projects in your school for the last five years, are the number of research activities increasing, decreasing, or remaining rather constant?

Increasing	59.0%
Decreasing	7.7%
Remaining constant	33.3%

*Some schools listed more than one factor. Therefore, the sum of percentages does not total 100.

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